

Service for Learning and Life and Every Student a Graduate



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First Graders Dive into Water Conservation

AmeriCorps Member Justin Kierzek serves at Thoreau Elementary, Milwaukee

Where does water come from? In October, first graders at Thoreau Elementary School in Milwaukee answered, "the faucet," when asked that question. Now they know the answer is much more complex, thanks to a service-learning water conservation project AmeriCorps member Justin Kierzek helped design with Teacher Gwen Bivins. The children noticed water in the soil when their teacher dug up a spadeful to show them all of the creatures that live in the soil. They



also noticed the build-up of litter and refuse in the field next to their school, a former retention pond that the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewage District (MMSD) had converted into a grassy field to reduce neighborhood flooding. What began as the answer to a simple question turned into a seven-month odyssey on water conservation, tied into all aspects of the Grade 1 curriculum.

Justin helped students carry out experiments, such as simulating wave action (in mid-winter) by blowing on a bowl of water and watching what happens to dye and debris. He built a model of a river, and helped children research questions, as well as read and write about water's uses and conservation. First graders came up with a plan to save water at school. They made posters, displayed in the school restrooms, explaining step-by-step how to wash their hands thoroughly without wasting water and came up with a "Five Second Rule" for drinking from the school bubblers.

First graders also wrote a super-sized letter to MMSD inviting a representative from the public entity to present on water conservation issues. MMSD agreed to be a community partner in the project and in mid-May a speaker from MMSD will lead a schoolwide clean-up of the area and demonstrate a water conservation model at a school assembly.

Justin also helped first graders produce a video about their project and what they learned. The video will be shown at the school assembly and every student's family will receive a copy. "The video was just perfect for a reflection piece," he said.

Students played a central role in moving the project forward, Justin said. "The students were the ones pushing the process. They started out not really knowing much about water. Then they became concerned about the pollution they saw near the school and in Lake Michigan. They decided they wanted to make a difference by changing how they drink and wash their hands with water at school. It was really neat to see."

Justin has some tips for AmeriCorps members attempting to develop service-learning projects connected to the curriculum: be flexible, get involved with a teacher open to doing a service-learning project, appeal to kids' interests, and be willing to answer kids' questions using a variety of media as you go along.

Oh, the Things We've Done! **during National Days of Service**

Wisconsin schools, families, and communities have reaped a rich harvest from the efforts of AmeriCorps members. Here are some of the service activities members have led in their communities thus far:

★ **Organized a Community**

Rake-a-thon - Jennifer Grezenski, Almond-Bancroft

★ **Celebrated the life of Dr.**

Martin Luther King Jr. with students on MLK Day – Sharon Schmidt, Grantsburg Elementary

★ **Participated in "Families**

Fixin' Food" on Global Youth Service Day – Randall Boen, Jackson County UW-Extension (see these on youtube.com)

★ **Helped coordinate and**

participated in a Thank You gathering of volunteers – Liz Stenroos, Hurley S.D.

★ **Helped winter**

weatherization project – Christina Vik, Ashland S.D.

★ **Chair-ity painting day**

with students at a Senior Center on Join Hands Day - Jake Larsh and Meg Juedes, Oshkosh S.D.

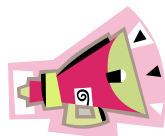
Upcoming 2011 National Days of Service are: 5/7, 6/4, 6/11, 7/8 and 8/2.

Tips for Nurturing Youth Voice

Student decision making leads to more meaningful programs

A hallmark of successful youth service-learning and volunteer efforts is that they honor “youth voice,” or the ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiatives of young people. This means that successful programs make room for students’ input in projects, plans, and policies. Youth voice does not mean talking loudly or giving all the power to young people. Youth voice is about considering the perspectives and ideas of young people, respecting what everyone has to say, taking risks, listening, sharing and working together. Following, are tips for listening to and using youth voice in your program:

- ➡ **Have a real conversation** with students. Ask students what they want to do. Find out how you can help make that happen.
- ➡ **Ask students’ advice** on school issues you’re wrestling with.
- ➡ **Ask students to help design a survey** for other students to explore likes, “what works,” challenges, and ideas for your program.
- ➡ **Invite students to tutor or mentor** younger students. Provide them with training and expectations beforehand.
- ➡ **Involve students in evaluating** your program. What did they learn during the year? What activities would they like to see next year?
- ➡ **Draw up a list of student-created expectations** and outcomes for your program. What do they want to accomplish? What’s not acceptable?
- ➡ **Team up with students to sponsor a student or community forum** on an issue or effort they care about.
- ➡ **Be an advocate for students at school meetings.** If students are not at the table when the school makes decisions, speak up for them.
- ➡ **Create lesson plans and** activities that clearly engage students as decision makers and critical thinkers in suggesting changes to improve the school environment.
- ➡ **Help students create a newsletter or posters** that describe their experiences in your program.
- ➡ **Join or form with students a school or community task force** to address youth issues and respond to them.
- ➡ **Recognize students for their efforts and contributions** to your program and to the school.
- ➡ **Ask a student for help.** Whether it’s a question about how your computer works or diversity, students can help. They just need to be asked.
- ➡ **Raise funds for a student-led organization** focusing on school issues.
- ➡ **Be a real, active, and engaged friend to students.**



Resources on Youth Voice

1. National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: Theory and Practice of Youth Voice:

<http://www.servicelearning.org/topic/theory-practice/youth-voice>

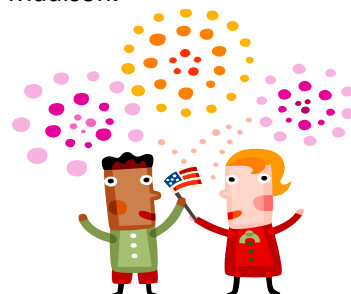
2. *Youth Voice: A Guide for Engaging Youth in Leadership and Decision Making in Service Learning Programs:*

<http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/7/YVGuide.pdf>

3. *Sound Out: Promoting Student Voice in School:* <http://soundout.org/tips.html>.

Get Ready for “Fireworks” on May 19!

Be sure to bring your dancin’ shoes and practice your moves for the “Fireworks” flash mob dance at the Serve Wisconsin AmeriCorps Closing Ceremony on Thurs., May 19, at the Alliant Energy Center, Madison.



There’ll be lots of great sessions, lunch is provided, and your expenses will be reimbursed for coming to this mandatory day of service, fun and education. Check-In begins at 9:30 a.m. and the day ends at 4 p.m.

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